

Written Statement of
Bob Odom
Commissioner, Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry

before the

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture

on

Transferring USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to
the proposed Department of Homeland Security

Wednesday, June 26, 2002

10:00am

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on proposed legislation creating a new Department of Homeland Security and transferring USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to this new department. My name is Bob Odom. I am the Commissioner of the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, and I appear here today on behalf of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) and my fellow Commissioners, Secretaries, and Directors from across the nation.

We strongly support the efforts of Congress and the Administration to decisively and expeditiously strengthen homeland security. As partners in the federal system, state departments of agriculture are keenly aware of the need for an effective strategy to safeguard the nation's agricultural production tools, especially food safety and animal and plant health.

We agree that greater coordination and integration among agencies is vital to biosecurity. Consolidating and incorporating essential animal and plant inspection activities at our nation's borders into a new department has been suggested. However, we urge you to fully and carefully examine how this proposal will affect the missions, tasks, and responsibilities of APHIS functions in all areas.

As you know, APHIS is responsible for the safety of the nation's food supply through animal and plant health protection. APHIS is the lead federal agency for veterinary accreditation, domestic and international plant and animal pests and diseases, animal welfare, and predator control. It is the agency responsible for the protection of plant and animal health through prevention, early detection, eradication and control of pests and diseases, whether introduced by accident or by deliberate act. APHIS deals with many pests, such as medfly and Asian long-horned beetles, and diseases, such as BSE, citrus canker, Karnal bunt and bovine tuberculosis. These are not basic homeland security issues and will not receive the necessary emphasis in a homeland security agency. It is important to have the ability to distinguish bioterrorist attacks from natural outbreaks. We strongly believe that maintaining all federal duties and responsibilities dealing with animal and plant health issues under one federal agency is critical for the proper functioning and efficient management of agriculture and the provision of a safe food supply.

There is an extensive and complex state-federal cooperative infrastructure currently in place to address animal and plant health matters which would be placed in serious jeopardy by proposed legislation. The backbone of our national animal and plant disease prevention, surveillance, and control programs is the cooperative effort between USDA and state agriculture and livestock agencies. States rely heavily on the APHIS state-federal cooperative programs to provide critical resources and expertise in the areas of plant and animal health. For example, in my state, APHIS provides personnel and other resources for surveillance and control for such diseases as brucellosis, tuberculosis, pseudorabies, Equine Infectious Anemia and boll weevil eradication as well as foreign animal diseases which may be introduced intentionally or accidentally. If these types of domestic/state APHIS activities are diminished, most states would not have the ability to provide the resources and expertise to continue these vital programs.

USDA has commissioned and received an external review with detailed recommendations for the safeguarding and protection of animal health with implications for homeland security. A second report on Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) provides additional review and proposals. The placement of APHIS into the Department of Homeland Security will split key agriculture offices between two federal agencies. State departments of agriculture provide the front line of defense for agriculture biosecurity. The close association of industry, state agriculture and USDA promotes and enhances cooperation and efficiency in providing the needed security. The transfer of APHIS

calls into question the ability of the Secretary of Agriculture to access the necessary professional resources and adequate emergency funds necessary to combat plant and animal pests and diseases whether introduced by accident or by deliberate act. We strongly believe that realigning USDA-APHIS activities and resources, as currently proposed, would be counterproductive. Rather than enhancing biosecurity, this realignment could actually have the unintended consequence of diminishing our biosecurity at the state level, which is our front line of prevention.

We believe that cross-utilization, full integration and coordination of APHIS functions with the Department of Homeland Security through the use of Memorandums of Understanding, cooperative agreements and prearranged contracts will enhance the United States' ability to protect our food supply more effectively than the transfer of these duties in APHIS to the new agency. State departments of agriculture strongly encourage you to consider this approach.

The state departments of agriculture are aware of the vital need to strengthen protections against terrorist threats or attacks in the United States. We stand ready to work with Congress and the Administration to develop an effective strategy to safeguard our agricultural production tools.

List of activities currently under APHIS responsibility that are not related to Homeland Security, Terrorism or Bioterrorism

- Animal disease diagnostics and foreign animal disease research carried out by National Veterinary Service Laboratories (NVSL) at Ames, Iowa and Plum Island, New York. These services are essential for the control and eradication of new and existing animal diseases.
- Animal disease research for both domestic and exotic diseases.
- Pest detection for plants beyond the points of entry.
- Administration of the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) program.

- Domestic Disease surveillance, monitoring and eradication programs:
 - Pseudorabies
 - Brucellosis
 - Tuberculosis
 - Scrapie
 - Azian Influenza
 - Chronic Wasting Disease
 - Johne's Disease
 - Karnal Bunt
 - Citrus Canker
 - Exotic fruit flies
 - Gypsy Moth
 - Golden Nematode
 - Imported fire ants
 - Boll Weevil eradication
- APHIS administers and provides indemnity compensation for a number of animal and plant programs and has access to Commodity Credit Corporation funds.
- Administers the Wildlife Services and Animal Care programs.
- Promotes export and sales of US agriculture products overseas.
- Participates in international organizations to provide US input to set and maintain high health standards. Organizations such as Plant Protection convention and Office of International Epizootics (OIE).